

Food For Thought
From Your Employee Assistance Program

Beating the Holiday Blue



We generally think of the holidays as a joyous, happy time. In our culture, the period between Thanksgiving and New Year's is a period when people come together to share food, exchange gifts and enjoy each others' company. But for some, the holidays are stressful; a time that elicits strong emotions (and not always positive ones). Consider for a moment the following information:

1. The Thanksgiving to New Year's holiday season occurs during the time of year when there are the fewest number of hours of daylight. Research has shown that ten percent of our population is significantly affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Regardless of other factors related to the holidays, sufferers of true Seasonal Affective Disorder may experience chronic fatigue, difficulty in sleeping, irritability, and feelings of sadness.

2. For most individuals, all of the activities of the holidays must be piled on top of all of their other responsibilities that, for most people, include both work and family. The 168 hours that there are in every week cannot be expanded. Consequently, many individuals feel a significant time crunch.

3. Only about 25% of all individuals are living within what would be considered a traditional family at the present time. Death, separation, divorce, remarriage, and job-related separations cause many individuals to feel a dissonance with the traditional holiday-related values.

4. The majority of Americans spend somewhere between 95% and 100% of each paycheck. Again, the period of time between Thanksgiving and New Year's brings about special costs that often increase debt. Financial stresses and pressures can create significant tension and conflict.

With these thoughts in mind, the following suggestions are offered to help keep the holidays a happy and joyous period of time:



1. Manage your time effectively during the holidays. Set reasonable goals about what can be accomplished during this period of time. In many ways in our culture, time is money. Shop during off-peak times--this means from January to the first of November. If space allows, consider stockpiling needed groceries well in advance of special events. This is a resource to be utilized wisely.

2. Set reasonable limits regarding the purchase of gifts. Unusual or unique gifts, handmade gifts, and gifts of time can create special meaning.

3. Set reasonable expectations about who you are going to visit and when. More and more families are beginning to pick off-peak times of the year to have their celebrations.

4. If loved ones are absent during the holidays, if relationships are broken, or there have been other types of tragedies, do not pretend that they do not exist. Denial takes more energy than talking openly about these issues. Whenever possible, emphasize the positive aspects of a relationship that has been lost, or allow yourself to put more energy into other relationships that have survived, as you reallocate your energy to other members in your extended network of family and friends.

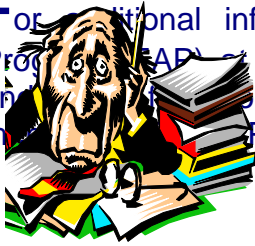
5. Resolutions really do work. They are simply elegant ways of developing goals. Remember that you cannot do a goal. There are steps to a goal. Limit the number of goals/resolutions for change that you develop. Consider having one that is work-related, one that is non-work-related, and one that is relationship or family related. Remember that in developing resolutions, you need to think S.M.A.R.T. In other words, be "S"--specific about what is to be accomplished; be "M"--have a goal that is measurable; be "A"--have a goal that is attainable; be "R"--have a goal that is result or output oriented; and, finally, be "T"--have a goal or resolution that is time bound. Whenever possible, share your goal with someone else and have him/her help you be accountable.

6. Because in certain parts of the country, the holidays are a time in which outdoor activity can be limited due to cold and darkness, do as well as you can in managing your calorie intake. Fatty foods, in the form of cheeses, processed meats, and sweets with lots of butter, as well as simple carbohydrates, abound during this type of season. Try to work out a schedule of some form of meaningful exercise during this period of time. If you bundle up enough, you will find the activity pleasant and enjoyable. Target your favorite foods and allow yourself to indulge, but with limitations. Consider keeping things like popcorn and other relatively low calorie munchies around the house. Your post-holiday "ten" may only be a post-holiday "two to five". This, of course, is a lot easier to live with.

7. Finally (and of most importance), remember the spirit of the holidays. Thanksgiving celebrates the bounty that surrounds us. It is people coming together to feast and reflect upon a year's harvest of labors. However great or small, there are things to be celebrated. As the year draws to a close, the importance of giving to others and sharing and bringing joy to the world are a central theme. New Year's is a time of new beginnings. A time to let go of the old, forget the past, and to rededicate our energies, our talents, and our love to

another year. New Year's is a reminder that, with every ending, there is a new beginning.

For additional information, please contact the DEA Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at 1-800-275-7460. The DEA EAP is completely confidential and provides consultation and support to DEA employees and their family members. The EAP is ready to help!



**The DEA Employee Assistance Program
1-800-275-7460**